

Ten years ago today I watched helplessly as my wife, Diane, slowly succumbed to lung cancer. She passed away May 7, 2001 at the age of 45 leaving behind 3 children, a family in emotional ruin, and me wondering how I could accomplish our dream of a college education for our children. That is the short story.

The long story started more than two years earlier with a nagging cough. The Doctor in our rural Montana community took a chest X ray but failed to recognize the clearly visible tumor on her lung. Thirteen months later after regular visits to the same doctor and treating her for variety of off the wall conditions Diane consulted a nurse practitioner who recognized the serious symptoms of lung disease. She was diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer. The disease had spread to her brain and other organs.

Two serious factors resulted in the untimely and avoidable death of Diane. 1. By miss reading the X ray all options for surgical removal of the tumor were forgone. 2. The attending physician's ego prevented him from recommending a specialist. Instead he treated her for a variety of ailments including thyroid conditions that had were not warranted considering the symptoms, (shortness of breath, and persistent cough). The only positive thing I can say about this physician is that he recognized his error and apologized to Diane and I. An apology doesn't compensate for the loss of an incredible wife and mother, the counseling for our children or for shattering the plans we had for them.

IF HB-405 were in force 10 years ago we would have been left with only that apology for Diane's death, and the emotional catastrophe that followed. The good doctor that miss-diagnosed Diane did a good job of documenting his rationale but the fact of the matter was he screwed up with a diagnosis that a nurse practitioner later made. There are good physicians and bad physicians we unfortunately were stuck with a bad physician. The settlement we received for Diane's death helped pay for our children's education. We will never be compensation for the loss.

The unfortunately part of living in the great rural state Montana is limited health care options. Our small town had one full time doctor, we trusted him and he let us down. Please do recognize the good doctors for what they do but do not hamstring the patients when their lives are ruined by a bad doctor.

Thank You

s/ Mark Petroni

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